

Lois D. Aimé
Submission 3/08/21
HB 6403

Representative Elliott, Senator Haskell and Distinguished Members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, I am Lois Aimé, Director of Educational Technology, and Adjunct Professor at Norwalk Community College. I am also President of the Norwalk Community College Senate and a member of the Faculty Advisory Committee (FAC) to the Board of Regents (BOR).

Much of what I am going to say I have already said in the 2/21/19 Public Hearing on SB749, and in testimony on HB5113 on 2/27/20 which were equivalent bills to the one we are addressing today. Neither of these bills made it to a full vote of the legislature. It needs to happen this session. I urge you all to support the passage of HB6403 both in this committee and in the full legislature. I feel like I am in the movie “Ground Hog Day” and it is depressing.

The Board of Regents of the CSCU system approved the Students First Consolidation proposal in 2017 with no public notice and no public hearing. The Board of Regents of the CSCU reports to no one. CT Public Higher Education is supported by the taxpayers of CT. They should, I should, have a say in some of the decisions that the BOR makes through our/my elected legislators. Until 2011 they/I did have that say. However, when the CSCU system and the BOR were created in that year, the legislature gave up that oversight.

Since that time the Board of Regents and the revolving door of CSCU presidents have lurched from one failed scheme after another at a cost of well over \$250M of taxpayer money. The current proposed “Students First” Consolidation of the 12 community colleges, is the one that will, very likely, lead to the demise of quality public higher education in CT. And the hardest hit students will be those who need us the most. Those students who use public higher education as a stepping-stone into the middle class. Therefore, this proposal continues to be the most dangerous, the most ill-conceived, and the most flawed.

In the 1960’s the legislature created the Connecticut Community College system and made it subject to legislative control. This made sense. A controlling body elected by the people would control a system that was created to support the people and the communities they served.

Currently, the Board of Regents answers to no one. It does what it wants and what it wants is to continue to pursue the one-college proposal put forward by then President Ojakian. The BOR has never asked a single question about the process, the costs, or about how this would serve to advance equity in our public higher education system and benefit our students, although we are constantly told, along with saving 23M, this will be the result of consolidation.

CT’s equity issues are pervasive. CT is one of the richest states in the country and yet has the second highest income inequality in the country, and our K-12 schools “...are among the most segregated in the country.” ([CT Mirror, January 4, 2021](#)) Income inequality is the major contributor in the quality of the schools in each city/town. Most of our students come from the cities and towns that have the least ability to properly fund their school systems. Thus, students who come to us, as open enrollment institutions, are by and large, ill-prepared to take college-level courses, through no fault of their own. I have never gotten an answer to my question as to how the consolidation of the community colleges into one monolithic college will improve equity in learning in CT. And that is because it will not.

When the proposed consolidation was introduced in 2017 it was all about the fact that the CT Community Colleges did not have the financial resources to allow all 12 colleges to remain open as independently accredited institutions. Mysteriously, that changed in the middle of the Higher Ed and Employment Advancement Committee Students First Consolidation Invitational Forum on March 26, 2019. At that forum Pres. Ojakian told legislators that “the primary focus of this is not to save money, saving money is an important

component of it, but it is really about student success number one.” Shouldn’t this abrupt change have raised some red flags and questions about what really was occurring in this system?

This committee and the full legislature must pass HB6403 and take back control over whether public colleges and universities can be merged or closed. These decisions should not be allowed to be made by an insulated bureaucratic entity that answers to no one. Restoring legislative control is imperative. It is the responsibility of the legislature to oversee what occurs in an organization that is publicly funded.

It is time for an examination, analysis, and review to determine the impact of BOR control on public higher education.

SUGGESTED SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE HB6403:

32 fails to act, such recommended merger or closing shall **NOT** be deemed

33 approved **and the BOR shall not seek regional accreditation for a merger that has not bee approved by the general assembly**

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